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BOOK REVIEWS

Talks on Writing English. By ARLO BATES. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

The Problem of Elementary Composition. By ELIZABETH H. SPALDING. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co.

It can hardly be said that the new books are making serious contributions to what is known of rhetorical laws. In our haste to be delivered from the barrens of the Scotch school, the last of the Stagirite race, we have let go all the unsettled problems. Presently the psychologists will solve some of them, like the one the answer to which Mr. Spencer rather distinctly failed to get; and then the psychologists will be the heroes. This neglect of theory has been necessary; better deny that there is a science of rhetoric, better get on with the slovenliest empiricism, than neglect the inarticulate child. At the same time, such books as Mr. Bates' are but brilliant restatements of principles that are somewhat hazily defined, and which are far from telling us all that would profit us as teachers of composition.

Yet what should we ask for in a series of popular lectures? Mr. Bates is none too empirical for his occasion; and his talks add another to the short list of similar works for which we should be thankful—books with literary flavor. No one would think of recommending it—one would think—as a systematic treatment of the subject, for a required course. What freshmen most need is definite rhetorical tasks like those—not to be invidious—provided in Mr. Hale's new *Constructive Rhetoric*. But freshmen and everybody need just such stimulating reading as Mr. Bates' book. They need all the hints that Mr. Bates, as teacher and writer, has been able to give; they need such enthusiasm as his for hard, scrupulous literary training; they need such style and such illustrations as his, tasting of the studio rather than the class room. Higher collegiate courses can make use of the author's full treatment of narrative, of character and purpose, and of criticism; but these chapters are in the main addressed by a successful litterateur to those who plan for a life at letters.

Mr. Bates is indebted to Professors A. S. Hill and Barrett Wendell for a good deal of theory. He supplements Mr. Wendell at certain points. He calls attention to the danger of fixing attention on unity so closely as to produce dryness (p. 35). He warns that the dogma of massing the sentence and the paragraph may lead to artificiality (p. 37). He expands Mr. Wendell's remarks about means and effects into two fine chapters.

There are always minor matters that may be criticised. Commenting on the daily-theme system (p. 26) the author seems severe on students who choose for subjects striking, even sensational, incidents. Must we not have vivid impressions, at any cost? Must we not have a fillip of the student's passive vocabulary of imaginative words? Shall we not be thankful for good romance, if we can't get good realism all at once? Later on (p. 125), there is a misleading word about narrative and description being more "emotional" than exposition and argument. Argument, surely, has not so fully reached the ideal *logikos genos* that we can refer to it in this secure way. On page 50 Mr. Bates thinks the phrase "in these circumstances" pedantic. Isn't there room for doubt here, room for a count from the classics? There certainly is room for surprise when, on page 137, Mr. Bates apparently regards "Old Nick" as a derivation from Nicholas Machiavel. In Macaulay's day there may have been a "schism among the antiquarians" as to the origin of the word. But surely the day of that kind of philology is past.

In the more characteristic parts the book is charmingly written. It recalls no one in particular—neither Mr. Genung's precision, nor Mr. J. M. Hart's terseness, nor Mr. A. S. Hill's nonchalant vigor, nor Mr. Wendell's insistent lucidity, nor Mr. Carpenter's Arnoldian temperance, nor Mr. Hale's brilliant colloquialism; but it is fresh and easy and imaginative and wholly free from mannerisms.

Turning for a minute to a piece of work much slighter in bulk than Mr. Bates', I find it hard to praise sufficiently Miss Spalding's discussion of the problem of elementary composition. It is the work of a born teacher; and we shall never get on with teaching how to write until we are all born anew as teachers. Miss Spalding shows pretty conclusively that the essential dogma of the whole subject can be given profitably to pupils in the grades. There is only one set of laws to learn; why shouldn't we teach them over and over each year from the ever-advancing vantage ground of the boy's or girl's age? How to

point—including how to point relative clauses restrictive and non-restrictive—how to paragraph, how to study words and acquire words for active use, how to love composition and know good English when it is seen—all these things can be so taught in the grades that future progress shall be rapid and delightful.

There is possibly one word of qualification needed to Miss Spalding's admirable suggestions; it is easy to teach too much. Children pick up analytic processes faster than they are sometimes supposed to do; and a boy can distinguish too readily between metaphors and similes; can know too many etymologies that may be right and may not; and he may become free of words that in his mouth will sound like pedantry. But dear me! what a relief it would be to see a few lads over-taught in English, even in "recent exemplifications of false philology."

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An Introduction to the Study of American Literature. By BRANDER MATTHEWS, A.M., LL.B., Professor of Literature in Columbia College. (American Book Company.)

OF making manuals for the text-book study of literature there is but small promise of the end. Many teachers know nothing of library methods, or are without libraries with which to use them, and many who have the wisdom lack the energy necessary to conduct work in literature by confining the study to strictly literary materials. Until the average instructor shall be convinced that it is better to guide his class to independent impressions and estimates of half a dozen authors than to cover the whole ground prescriptively, text-books will be in large demand, and literature will wait and suffer as hitherto.

Professor Matthews' book is not a manual of the usual sort. There are no "chapters," there is no discussion of periods, or attempt to set up philosophical divisions in the history of writing or of reading in our commonwealth of letters. The author treats, in an introduction, of literature in general, following this with a six-page mention of colonial books and authorship from John Smith to Jonathan Edwards. The book proper, which then begins, consists of fourteen sketches, in chronologic order, of the great careers that have furnished, essentially, the most and best of what is known as American literature. The subjects respectively are Franklin, Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Halleck and Drake, Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Holmes, Thoreau,